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Folklore and Male Homosexuality

VENETIA NEWALL

Presidential Address to the Society at the Annual General Meeting, 15 March 1986

A whistling woman and a crowing hen
is good to neither God nor man.

Alan Dundes used this traditional saying in a well-known paper¹ to highlight a study of male chauvinism. But I would like to use it as an image for my topic of today. Even now, I think there is still a strong tendency to romanticize folklore, to regard it as something rather charming and quaint, that we can escape into when the outside world becomes disagreeable. But looked at in another way, it stands as a record of the unkind way in which we often treat other people.

The first book on folklore that I ever looked at was Christina Hole's *English Custom and Usage*. When I picked it up, it fell open at page 67, where I read:

Until the middle of the last century May Eve was marked by the visits of the May Birchers, who came round to the different houses of the parish and decorated the doors with boughs of trees and flowers by which they expressed their opinion of the occupants. In Cheshire the plants chosen were supposed to rhyme with the word that best described those who lived within. The fair in face or character had pear boughs set over their doors, the glum had plum branches, the morose had alder (locally pronounced 'owler,' which rhymed with scowler). A thorn branch meant an object of scorn, and gorse in bloom over a woman's door conveyed the worst of insults. In Hertfordshire, the unpopular might find their thresholds disfigured by nettles, or some other unpleasant weed.²

No doubt there were people who thought this obnoxious custom picturesque, but how unpleasant and hurtful to be a recipient of such treatment. Violet Alford, who was interested in such observances, wrote of:

... that scorn of both childless and of unmarried people—the fining in Ireland of an unmarried man when he reaches thirty, the daubing of his doorposts, the mockery of girls who 'coiffent Ste Catherine'—at the advanced age of twenty-five—the worse than mockery, the brutality, to Swiss girls at Carnival time. In Aargau they are driven out to an open moor while others are dancing, they are put up to auction in the inn, drenched with wine, to punish them for their continued childless state.³

Rough Music, known by a variety of names because it was so widespread, occurred all over Europe. It was of course a form of communal punishment, designed for anyone offending received custom, especially sexual mores.⁴ In his novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Thomas Hardy describes the tradition at some length, and the effect that it had on those involved.⁵ The shame of such humiliation was appalling. In Hardy's account, Lucetta, the woman protagonist, dies from shock; nor was this an exaggeration. Violet Alford collected evidence of numerous injuries and deaths resulting from the custom.⁶ She says village people considered it their right: 'they will assert the right if the police interfere; if summoned they will use it as a plea before the Magistrate in all good faith.'

A Yorkshire verse announced:

Pray take warning
For this is above the law.⁷

In Devon the local version was known as the Stag Hunt and, according to Theo Brown, it was sometimes performed against homosexuals:⁸ 'When I described it at an Extra-Mural class . . . a member exclaimed . . . "What a good idea! Why on earth don't we do it now?"'

In this custom, and its many variants, we see mirrored the inflexible morality of the folk, summoned with all its force against the non-conformist, to crush him or her into the mould that the community has prepared. I once went shopping with a friend, who remarked in despair: 'I don't believe that anyone is really stock size!' I think she had a point. And yet tradition demands that we all fit into the great social stock size of society. This is a strongly recurring theme in folklore, which has tended to collect around any individual, object, observance, act, event, or whatever, which deviates in any way from the accepted norm, and is hence deemed to be unnatural. Do you have red hair? Then you must be related to the devil. Do your eyebrows meet on your nose? Then you must be a werewolf. And so on. Sexuality, as Jeffery Weeks points out, is viewed as archetypally 'natural.' Since at least the time of Rousseau it has been represented as the assertion of self against the preternaturally distorting effects of modern, and later industrial, civilization.¹⁰ This is, of course, the romantic view, but then, as I said earlier, there is an enormous tendency to be romantic.

In fact, homosexual or gay subcultures have existed for at least two thousand years with varying degrees of visibility.¹¹ Some major religions, like Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Zoroastrianism, were severe in their attitudes, the result, it seems, of equating homosexual practices with unbelief and idolatry. This was the view of that eminent scholar, Edward Westermarck, Professor of Sociology at the University of London, and a distinguished past President of this Society.¹² The Zoroastrians were struggling to hold their own against Shamanism, and it was important for a small Hebrew tribe to procreate if it was going to survive; homosexual practices within that historical context were associated with the pagan rituals of neighbouring cults. Thus the Mosaic law, as set out in *Leviticus*, regarded sex as solely for procreation, in the interests of population, and in keeping with the Jewish theory of abominations, which renders certain actions unclean.¹³ This attitude, which persisted into the 19th century, passed into Islam, which forbade homosexuality in the Koran,¹⁴ and also into Christianity. The Pauline Epistles argue that sexual relationships of any sort outside procreative heterosexual monogamy are unnatural and transgressions of the divine purpose. European tradition refined this in the teaching of Thomas Aquinas, who held that the only natural, and therefore legal, sexual acts had the procreation of children as their object.¹⁵

Christian teaching had a lasting influence on legislation in Europe. Constantine passed severe laws against sexual inversion. But leading authorities believe modern opinion derives from legislation enacted by Justinian in 538 A.D., which created a permanent social antipathy.¹⁶ During a series of natural disasters, which the Emperor supposed were God's punishments for 'abominations against nature,' homosexuals were killed en masse, 'lest as a result of these impious acts whole cities would perish, together with their inhabitants.'¹⁷ By the time of the Middle Ages it was commonplace to equate homosexuality with heresy, witchcraft, and treason.^{17A} Indeed the same word was sometimes used to mean both heretic and homosexual. For example, the French *bougre*, from the Latin *Bulgarus*, meaning a Bulgarian, originally referred, like its English synonym, to an 11th century sect of heretics in Bulgaria, who were supposed to indulge in this practice. Later it was extended to refer to all heretics.¹⁸ Interestingly, English folk tradition in the late 17th century maintained that sodomy originated in

infidel Turkey and spread into Europe with the papist Italians, an extension of the connection with heresy idea.^{18A} The link with Roman Catholicism was probably invented by propagandists of the Reformation, who adapted the earlier identification of heresy with sodomy to their own use.^{18B} As to magic, benevolent or otherwise, the association was to be found in many cultures. Westermarck points out that such individuals were sometimes held in repute by the people as practitioners of supernatural acts and shamanistic rituals.^{18C}

Until 1885 the only legislation which affected homosexuals in England was a statute enacted against sodomy by Henry VIII in 1533. The punishment, death for both men and women, seems to have been intended to protect reproductive sex within marriage. Non-purposive sex was held to be a social threat.¹⁹ But, as Weeks points out, cross-cultural evidence shows that other cultures were successful in integrating forms of homosexual behaviour into their social patterning, e.g. the pedagogic relationships of ancient Greece and acceptable berdache (transvestite) roles in certain tribal societies.²⁰

In 1861 the death penalty for sodomy in England was removed and replaced by a sliding scale of ten years to life imprisonment. This was followed in 1883 by the Labouchère Amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act. Known as the Blackmailer's Charter in popular tradition, it rated acts of gross indecency between men as 'misdemeanours,' punishable by up to two years' hard labour. Thus, all forms of male homosexual behaviour became illegal in England.²¹ The sensational trial of Oscar Wilde in 1895 was the next major event. It provided a terrifying moral tale for those who chose to view it in that way, and was denounced by such stalwarts as the Rev. Richard Armstrong of the Social Purity Alliance. Meanwhile the changing legal situation became associated with what Weeks aptly terms the 'medical model,' and concepts of immorality, sin and evil were replaced, in part, by images of insanity, sickness, and disease.²²

A less flamboyant trial in 1954, of Lord Montague of Beaulieu and Peter Wildeblood, Diplomatic Correspondent of the *Daily Mail*, for homosexual offences committed by adults in private, led to the setting up by the government of the Wolfenden Committee in the same year. Almost a century earlier, John Stuart Mill had declared in his essay *On Liberty* (1859) that the only justification for legal intervention in private life was to prevent harm to others. Following this, the Wolfenden Report argued that the criminal law should preserve public order and decency and not impose a morality upon adult individuals. There were areas of life which did not concern the criminal law, and male homosexuality in private should therefore cease to be a criminal offence. Wolfenden further rejected the notion that homosexuality was a disease. In 1967 the Sexual Offences Act decriminalized adult male behaviour, provided it was in private, the partners over 21, and not members of either the merchant navy or the armed services. The year 1969 provided another landmark when the New York police raided the Stonewall Inn, a popular gay haunt in Greenwich Village. The clientele fought back, for the first time, and the event inspired a new feeling which subsequently found expression in the annual Gay Pride Marches.²³ Gay Liberation Front, a group favouring a more tolerant social attitude towards homosexuals, founded in London in October 1970, was soon superseded by a variety of self-help organizations, which are increasingly active today.

The gay community, unlike many other social groups, has no physical, economic, religious, occupational or chronological boundaries, and yet it is restricted. Its essential nature, secretiveness, makes a study of its culture and traditions far from easy. There is also, for the outsider, the problem of having only stereotyped homosexuals as a point of

reference.²⁴ Gay subculture, though more open than in the past, remains largely hidden because of the stigma that still attaches to it. And yet homosexuals, according to most estimates, constitute about 10% of the population, and their traditions, as Joe Goodwin points out, form a significant part of urban folklore.²⁵ Members of the gay community cannot look to family, church, school and the accepted social organizations as part of their learning process. They must rely on each other and much of this information has been, and still is, passed on in the form of folklore.²⁶ The oral tradition here is of particular importance and harks back to the days, not so long ago, when a false step could mean a prison sentence or risk of blackmail. There is nothing new in this. For example, during the years of Turkish occupation in the Christian lands of the Balkans, it was necessary to be circumspect. To be found in possession of manuscripts praising local heroes who had fought the Turks could be very dangerous, so the tradition of heroic epic went underground, and was passed on orally.²⁷

Secrecy is maintained by a range of signals, invisible to most people, but recognizable by other gays.²⁸ Among the signs are the wearing of particular colours associated with being gay, sometimes only on a specific day. Wolf cites the use of green or yellow on Thursday:

Some women reported inadvertently putting on these colours and then remembering it was 'Fairy Day' and hastily changing clothes. A colour even more strongly associated with being gay and used as such by the gay community itself is lavender. During the lesbian protest . . . in 1970, the women wore lavender T-shirts and referred to themselves as the Lavender Menace in response to Betty Friedans referring to the issue of lesbianism as a 'lavender herring.' A reason for the association of lavender with being gay, reported by a lesbian who had been in the gay community for several years, is that 'pink is for girls, blue is for boys, so the colour in between, lavender, is for homosexuals.'²⁹

In 1945, when I was a senior at Lincoln High School in Seattle (the) term (Lavender Lads) was applied in disparaging tones to a close-knit team of four or five quiet senior boys, who were popularly believed to be practising homosexuals. When I asked 'But why call them *lavender*?' one of the bully boys replied . . . 'That's the favourite colour of queers. They go mad over it!'³⁰

An informant writes:

Thursday was known as 'Queers' Day' among adolescents that I knew in elementary and junior high school (early 1960s) in St. John's. If someone was thought to take special care on Thursdays (for instance, shining shoes, pressing pants) then he might be thought to be honouring Queers' Day and therefore to be queer himself. To wear green socks, by the same people, was thought to be a sure token of queerness, of being homosexual. To do so on Thursday was a statement beyond doubt. Around age twelve or thirteen, I received for Christmas a pair of bright green knitted socks from an Aunt. For a long time I refused to wear them, for fear of ribbings from friends.³¹

In the early 1960s M.R.A. publications stated that one could 'spot a homosexual' by his green or brown clothes, and suede shoes.^{31A}

In the mid to late 1970s, states a correspondent of *The Guardian*, white socks were a gay signal for men in England.³² Pink is another significant colour. An American informant observes that it was customary to say of a gay man: 'That guy's a pink.'³³ Two years ago an article in the *Sunday People* noted that: 'the booming business in bars, clubs, clothing shops, and holiday firms catering to homosexual tastes is known as the 'pink' economy. And money spent in this . . . world is known as the pink pound.'³⁴ Pink is the focal point of the following *blason populaire*:

One day a cowboy rides into town and he is dressed entirely in pink: pink shirt, pink pants, pink vest, pink chaps, pink boots—even the horse is pink. He asks a man crossing the main street [collector's note: in a high, thin, squeaky voice, but not effeminate or lisping]: 'Excuse me, can you direct me to the saloon?' The man says: 'Yeah, just down the street, on your right.' 'Thank you.' So he goes down the street, ties his horse in front of the saloon, walks in. The saloon is almost deserted. He says to the bartender: 'May I have a drink please.' [in the same high, squeaky voice] 'What'll it be?' 'A glass of warm milk.' He gets the drink and asks the bartender [again the high voice], 'Say, where is the action in this town?' 'I hear there's gonna be a hangin' on the north edge of town.' 'Oh? Thank you.' So he finishes his milk, gets on his horse, rides side-saddle up the street till he sees a mob by an oak tree. He rides up into the crowd, and asks a man: 'Say, what's going on here?' in the high voice. The man says 'We're about to have a necktie party. Yuh see, there's this queer in town, and we hang queers.' The pink cowboy says [in a very deep voice]: 'NO SHIT!',³⁵

The cowboy is of course the epitome of the masculine in American culture and the voicing of the teller is central to the significance of this narrative, which burlesques the popular image with the use of pink and the unusual drink, at the same time conveying an undertone of menace. There are variants in the Berkeley Folklore Archives and one is glossed thus by the student collector: 'The fact that most people will know that the man is a homosexual when he first speaks, shows another prejudice in our culture. When in fact probably no homosexual talks like that, we've all been socialized that they do.'³⁶

Other colours used as signals include the wearing of red ties, said to have been popular in New York early in the century.³⁷ More widespread is the wearing of male jewellery: earrings, finger-rings, and necklaces. A ring on the left little finger, a popular signal about 20 years ago, has been revived.³⁸ Initially a single earring indicated that the wearer was gay; worn on the left it meant a preference for the active role in sexual relations. But the significance has become confused as earrings, finger-rings and other signals have become fashionable in straight, or non-homosexual society; fieldwork reports in the Berkeley Folklore Archives and elsewhere are contradictory.³⁹ Curiously, although gay men are stereotyped as effeminate in their dress styles, their fashions are adopted, and with great rapidity, by non-homosexual men.⁴⁰

Objects displayed in the back pocket convey a clearer significance. A miniature teddy bear indicates a desire to be cuddled. Handbags and the wearing of keys outside the trousers, clipped to a belt or pocket, originated as gay fashions designed to prevent unsightly objects spoiling the line of the trousers; keys on the left indicate the active role, on the right, passive. An elaborate handkerchief code, involving a multiplicity of colours, signals the sexual preferences of the wearer; the colour and positioning, usually, but not invariably, in a back pocket, are both means of providing information.⁴¹ The custom is said to have originated in 19th-century Colorado mining towns, where men with pocket bandanas played 'follower' and those without were 'leader' at Friday night dances where few or no women were present.⁴² I am told that in the Soviet Union, where homosexuality is illegal and punishable by heavy penalties, gay men signal by wearing the flaps of the traditional fur hats down, with the strings untied.⁴³

In the West more aggressive symbols, recognizable outside gay culture and popularized by the gay liberation movement, include the wearing of buttons with suitable slogans, e.g. 'a woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle,' the pink triangle, an emblem which thousands of homosexuals were forced to wear in Nazi concentration camps before they were exterminated; and the Greek letter lambda, on a necklace or tie-pin.⁴⁴ Eye contact, referred to as 'The Look' is a popular form of signalling, especially within the context of a gay community: 'I use it all the time. Usually it ends up that you just stare and smile and hope for the best. If he's not gay, you'll find out soon enough.'⁴⁵

There is of course nothing new in any of this. The poet Catullus refers to homosexual signalling in the public baths of ancient Rome. The hand was closed, the middle finger raised. Another signal involved scratching the head with the little finger.⁴⁶ More recently Desmond Morris has written of the way in which we all signal with clothing, adornment, and body language.⁴⁷ The folklorist Petr Bogatyrev, in a classic study, discussed the multiple signals expressed by the wearing of folk costume.⁴⁸ On a recent visit to Turkey I learned with surprise that the elaborately patterned traditional socks that I had bought conveyed complicated information regarding the wearer's marital status and availability.⁴⁹

The once secret gay signals have been much written about and are now, to some extent, common knowledge. A Christmas card, kindly sent to me by Georgina Boyes, depicts two reindeer gazing disapprovingly at Santa Claus, who stands, limp-wristed, sporting a red handbag and back-pocket handkerchief. 'Suit yourselves, deers,' he says, 'but me and Rudolph like it.' The image is a typical stereotype.⁵⁰ A limp flap of the wrist is a gesture sometimes used by straight men, especially comedians, to indicate that they think a particular man is gay.^{50A}

It is, I think, less well known that there is a specific gay vocabulary, or argot, known as *palare*. Its origin appears to be *parlyaree*, a mid-19th-century slang used by circus people and travelling actors, which is rich in Romany, Yiddish and Italian words. In 1958 Richard Hauser was asked by the Home Office to prepare a survey on homosexuality. A brief one-page Appendix points out selected terms, e.g. *VARDA*, to see or observe, from Romany *VARTER* (to watch). Hence 'How jolly to *VARDA* your *EEK*', *eek* standing for backslang *ECAF* (face). *OMEE* (man), *POLONEE* (woman), *BONA* (good, attractive), *SLAP* (make-up), *DRAG* (women's clothing, originally worn by male actors playing female roles), and backslang *RIAH* (hair). 'Varda the *Bona Omee* with the packed lunch' means 'Look at the good-looking man in the tight trousers'; 'Varda the *Bona Omee* in the naff sheikel' is 'Look at the good-looking man in the awful wig.'⁵¹ There is also some rhyming slang. Much *parlare* is esoteric and not well known in the gay community, though some of it was used by the comedian Kenneth Williams in the BBC vintage comedy programme *Round the Horne*.⁵²

A less obscure group of words and phrases describe the hunt for sexual partners, e.g. trolling, cruising, and on the game (prostitution). Cruising did not originally relate to homosexuality. It first appears in late 17th-century London street literature describing the activities of female prostitutes, which were compared to pirate vessels.⁵³ Tea Room Trade, Cottaging, and Going to Worship at the Porcelain Goddess all refer to the impersonal sex which takes place in public conveniences. Men and women interested in both sexes are AC/DC, a term originating from the electrical process of alternating and direct current.⁵⁴ Alice Blue Gown is used in San Francisco, sometimes referred to as the gay capital of the world, to mean a policeman,⁵⁵ while camp, the celebration of effeminacy, often involves playing to the gallery, e.g. 'camp as Christmas,' 'camp as

Chloe' and 'camp as a row of pink tents.' Oscar Wilde was a leading exponent of the form.⁵⁶

All homosexuals call each other queen at one time or another. Usually a friendly term, it may be used to describe an effeminate man; it can also refer to any homosexual displaying outlandish clothing or behaving in an excessive way. Many compounds use the word. A comprehensive listing of these and other specialized vocabulary appears in *The Queen's Vernacular*. Here is a brief selection: chicken queen (an older man who prefers young men in their late teens) 'So many chickens were flapping around that I thought we were touring Colonel Sander's plantation;' a snow queen is a black who likes white men; a dinge queen has black partners; a bean queen consorts with Latin men, a rice queen, sometimes said to suffer from yellow fever, with Asians; female impersonators are known as drag queens. Water chestnuts, incidentally, are oriental sailors in port.⁵⁷

Ritual insults occur in several North American subcultures. Roger Abrahams has written about Playing the Dozens, a folk art form popular with urban black adolescents.⁵⁸ Gay data in this style is abundant and three basic themes are common to black and gay ritual insults alike: degree of conformity to the stigmatised dominant culture, relative income, and, especially, sexual receptivity, e.g. 'We can't afford to lose another sofa'(a reference to the size of the other's distended sexual zone). 'And you wall-papered your womb' . . . 'Cross your legs, your hemorrhoids (sic) are showing' . . . 'You need to strap yours forward, so you'll have a basket' (a reference to the genitals) . . .

'Better than back-combing my pubics (sic) like you do' . . . 'Ships passing in the night have nothing on you!' 'Me? Your bedroom looks like the Hong Kong harbour!' . . . 'Where were you last night? Your eyes look like road-maps!' . . . 'You're like a railroad track: laid all over the country!' And so on.⁵⁹

A group of words characterize a gay man as female. We have already noted Queen. Others include Auntie, Marianne, Nancy, Nelly, Mary and Dorothy. Mary was especially popular, no doubt because it made good-humoured fun of a name which, with its religious and homely associations, was, in the words of an old song 'a grand old name.'⁶⁰ 'Do you know Dorothy?' (i.e. 'Are you gay?') was a secret phrase used by gay men in the 1940s and 1950s—and recently revived—when in the company of other people. It refers to Judy Garland, who played the part of Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. She is one of a number of female cult figures admired for their style. Others include Joan Crawford, Mae West—said, according to tradition, to be a man in drag—and Dusty Springfield. Tallulah Bankhead inspired the film *All About Eve*, which provided a vehicle for another cult figure, Bette Davis.⁶¹

A cycle of humorous legends has grown up around the flamboyant personality of Tallulah and circulates widely among gay men:

(i) Tallulah Bankhead was, as everybody knows, a very faithful communicant of the Episcopal church, and went to Saint Mary the Virgin in New York, which is the highest church in the Anglican communion in this country. And she was seated next to the aisle, and as the procession came in, the thurifer led the way—the thurifer is the person who swings the thurible or incense pot—and she reached out and grabbed him as he came by, saying, 'I love the drag, honey, but your purse is on fire.'

(ii)'With your deep voice, Miss Bankhead, has anyone ever mistaken you for a man?' said a male interviewer. 'No, darling. Has anyone ever made the mistake with you?'

(iii) Tallulah and [her friend] were putting some new black and white curtains up in Tallulah's apartment. Tallulah was on the ladder and [her friend] was holding it steady. All of a sudden Tallulah slipped and fell on top of [her friend], with the curtains in a heap on top of them. Tallulah started laughing hysterically. [Her friend] said, 'Tallulah! What are you laughing about?' And Tallulah said, 'Oh, I'm just remembering those two nuns we had in the back seat of the car.'

(iv) Tallulah and [another actress] went for a ride in the country. And [the other woman] said, 'Tallulah, you're just going to *have* to stop the car. I *have* to pee!' So Tallulah stopped the car and [her friend] went off in the bushes to pee. And, while she was peeing, this snake slithered up and bit her on the twat. And she thought, 'Oh, my God! *What* am I going to do?' So she called Tallulah and said, 'Tallulah, you're going to *have* to go into town and find a doctor. A *snake* has bitten me on the twat!' So Tallulah got back into the car and drove back to town and found a doctor and said, 'Doctor, the most *dreadful* thing has happened. A *snake* has bitten my *dear* friend . . . on the *twat*. *What* are we going to do?' And the doctor said, 'Well, you're going to have to go back and take a big bite out of it and suck out all the poison!' So Tallulah got back in the car and drove back out to the woods and got out of the car and [her friend] said, 'Tallulah, *what* did the *doctor* say?' And Tallulah said, 'He said you're going to *die*, dahling.'⁶²

England has several more dignified legends centred on female royal figures. Although it is illegal under British military ruling, there has never been a law against lesbianism as such, due, no doubt, to ignorance of female sexuality.⁶³ Popular tradition attributes this to the fact that when an adviser enquired whether women were to be included in the new laws currently being enacted against male homosexuality, Queen Victoria exclaimed, 'I have never heard of such a thing,' and that was the end of that. Someone should collect legends of Queen Victoria; there are so many.⁶⁴ A current member of her family, that much loved figure, the Queen Mother, is 'reputedly very nice to gays.'⁶⁵ Legend has it that an argument erupted among the gay staff in her kitchens at Clarence House, and they came to blows. At the height of the battle, the Queen Mother herself came in quietly, and said, 'I don't know about you queens, but this queen wants her breakfast.'⁶⁶

Festivals play an important part in any study of folklore, and Halloween has been described as the national holiday of homosexuals. In San Francisco what began as a street party focused on gay bars has become a public institution, when thousands of people crowd into the gay part of town to watch the drag parade of elaborate costumes.⁶⁷ Writing of a gay Thanksgiving Day Drag Ball, Cory says: 'It is a masquerade, ironically enough, where one goes to discard the mask.'⁶⁸ His comments can equally apply to gay Halloween for 'the festival provides an opportunity for intensifying and expanding an idealised stereotype of the gay world, symbolised by the drag queen.'⁶⁹ Put another way, 'Halloween is that one special time of year which brings out the drag queen in all of us,'⁷⁰ and *The Queen's Vernacular* quotes: 'To a drag queen, it's "how many more shopping days till Halloween?"'⁷¹ In London fancy dress Halloween parties are held in gay clubs.⁷²

Western society has been fairly consistently hostile to transvestism, though it has tolerated impersonation at certain events such as Halloween, Carnival and masquerades. Some of this disapproval can be traced to the Bible: 'The women shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment; for all that do so are an abomination unto the Lord thy God.'⁷³ The charges against Joan of Arc were summarized in 12 articles and two dealt with transvestism.⁷⁴ Today women can wear pretty well what they like, but with men the stigma remains. The folk term 'legal drag queen' refers to a gay man who only wears drag for events that are legal, i.e. when dressing as a woman is permitted without social chastisement, e.g. Halloween and Fasching, or Mardi Gras.⁷⁵ The great New Orleans Carnival contains a strong drag element. Inventive and bizarre female costumes are traditionally displayed in the French Quarter, a gay residential area where a Beauty Contest is always held on the afternoon of Shrove Tuesday. The Mardi Gras groupings are known as krewes and traditionally several are gay. In 1981 there were seven, the year when the first gay black krewe was formed. A gay Mardi Gras Ball is held in the evening, which is among the most spectacular events in town. Carnival Queens of the Gay Balls, incidentally, are always men.⁷⁶

There are transvestite elements in English traditional custom. Describing the Padstow Hobby Horse celebration, *The Cornish Guardian* of May 1911 says six fishermen 'dressed themselves in ladies' fashionable attire, one even wearing the harem skirt, which caused great amusement.' Today the Teaser wears white shirt and trousers, but old photographs show a variety of fancy dress costumes, and sometimes he would dress as a woman. A local recalls Bill Thomas, who died in 1977: 'I remember his pink dresses, the lovely bonnets he had . . . pink satin underwear . . . and garters.' Some of this seems a little unnecessary and one wonders whether masking in this case provided an opportunity to wear drag without adverse comment. For some years a man dressed as a woman was always part of the Blue Ribbon Group, and the Old Oss party. In many of our traditional customs sexual reversal, in the form of a man dressed as a woman, is very common, and Dr. Cawte points out that this is the single character most commonly associated with ritual animal disguise.⁷⁷ Transvestite disguise was a feature of various outbreaks of civil unrest in Great Britain: the Rebecca Riots in Wales of the 1830s and 1840s,⁷⁸ General Ludd's Wives in 1812,⁷⁹ those who opposed the enclosure of Otmoor Common in 1815,⁸⁰ and the Captain Swing Disturbances of the 1830s.⁸¹ However, the reason for the tradition of female disguise for rioters seems fairly straightforward. It was effective, cheap, and readily available to those who were not well off. And social mores of the past decreed that women must be modest and wear flowing garments that concealed. Possibly it was also thought that the authorities, not wishing to attack women openly, would be placed at a psychological disadvantage.⁸²

The transvestite community of San Francisco is evidently large, and active in social work, as witnessed by the following account of a transvestite rite of passage in January last year:

Robert Wasson, an active member of the Bay Area transvestite community, was buried in Oakland yesterday in services attended by close to 250 friends. Wasson, 49, worked as a clerk in an adult bookstore in downtown Oakland. He was shot early on the morning of January 23 by a robber who escaped with a small amount of cash. Wasson was a founder of the Alameda County branch of the gay 'imperial court,' a loose network of social clubs frequented primarily by transvestites. Under Wasson's guidance, the Alameda County court grew to 200 members. The group organised fund raisers and benefit performances for the Special Olympics, Children's Hospital, and social service agencies for the poor and elderly . . . the service was a mixture of sorrow and intermittent humour, as friends mourned Wasson but tried to bring out the laughter they said he often sought to evoke. 'I told him he'd have a packed house one day,' said one of his close friends, Ed Paulsen. Wasson was buried in a silver crown and a white-lace, high-collared dress, which a friend said he had bought to wear to a gala court event next month. A teddy bear and a bag of potato chips were placed in the lavender coffin with him.⁸³

The outrageous birthday present is an occasional feature of another gay rite of passage. A straight (i.e. non-gay) female acquaintance was startled when a gay male friend sent her, as a 21st birthday present, a young South American, his ex-boyfriend. I am told that the present was delighted; she was not. The custom seems to derive from an episode in Mart Crowley's play, *The Boys in the Band*. Presented in 1968, it was the first time that male homosexual life had been openly portrayed. The action focuses on a birthday party and one of the gifts is a live cowboy, who arrives with a birthday card tied to his wrist.⁸⁴

The most important gay rite of passage is the process known as 'coming out of the closet,' defined by Seymour Kleinberg as 'a social stance . . . a social act, a way of defining one's relations to others.'⁸⁵ Phrases like 'in the closet' and 'closet case' refer to gays who hide their identity from heterosexual friends, for fear of being condemned as 'queer.'⁸⁶ To 'come out of the closet' is to identify, both publically and personally, as

gay. Coming-out personal experience narratives are an important category of gay folklore. Sometimes, like the old stories of the rabbis, they provide built-in advice, support, and counselling, a form of traditional therapy.⁸⁷ Coming out could also be the occasion for a special celebration:

We celebrated birthdays, and Christmases, and we made a big to do about when they came out—and we always told them, you know, that was like a—birthday almost. And you celebrated that, you—um—mine will be now, see, twelve years and, ah, that was like a special day. You always remembered your coming out day. And they had parties in those days for that. That was something they did a lot.⁸⁸

Coming out is important because, even now, it can be a traumatic experience, involving alienation of parents and friends, and sometimes even the loss of a job. This is because there is still a great deal of prejudice. I attended a social gathering recently where a number of men were sitting together on their own. A woman came over and expressed surprise. One of the men explained 'We're gay.' 'Goodness,' was her reply. 'We don't have anything like that in Yorkshire!'

In the United States Anita Bryant's 'Save our Children' Florida campaign in 1977, and the Rev. Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority in 1979, have whipped up feeling. During this period bumper stickers appeared in Miami inscribed 'Kill a Queer for Christ,'⁸⁹ and the following is from an editorial in a local newspaper: 'The White People's Committee to Restore God's Law is not embarrassed to admit that we endorse and seek the execution of all homosexuals . . . We find that we must endorse and support the law of God which calls for the death penalty to the faggot slime.'⁹⁰ In 1981 a San Francisco minister publically called for the death penalty for homosexual acts,⁹¹ and when a Jewish woman told her father she was a lesbian, he recited *Kaddush*, the ritual prayer for the dead.⁹²

This prejudice is apparent, in varying degrees, in many of the narratives, riddles, and, of course, *blasons populaires* on this theme. A reason appears to be that homosexuals are regarded as a threat to social stability, which is based on family life. Men are especially fond of telling hostile homosexual jokes. They appear to serve as an anxiety reducer, enabling the narrator to identify with heterosexual society, as well as enhancing the status of those at the bottom of the social scale.⁹³

Parodies are unusual but one comes across a few:

Sweetest little fellow
Wears his mother's clothes,
Don't know what to call him
But I think he's one of those.

is sung to the tune of 'Mighty like a rose' and dates back to the 1960s.⁹⁴ 'Homo take bromo and wake up feeling yourself again,' is based on advertisements for Bromo Seltzer, a commercial product for relieving aches and pains.⁹⁵

A cluster of narratives are based on the stereotype of effeminacy and, since I have spoken at some length about transvestism, it seems appropriate at this point to quote the very relevant statement of the Rev. George Henry:

The popular conception of the homosexual is that of an extremely flamboyant individual, outlandishly dressed, effeminate in speech and appearance, walking with mincing gait, and given to exaggerated mannerisms which proclaimed his idiosyncrasies to all and sundry. Such is the case with only a minority of the group. The ordinary run of homosexuals are not to be distinguished from their fellow citizens by a casual observer.⁹⁶

The tone of the first narrative is immediately set by the use of the derogatory term 'queer':

There are two queers who walk into a bar. And one of them says to the bartender [in an effeminate voice]: 'Freddie would like a gin.' And the bartender replies, 'We have three kinds: oxygen, nitrogen, and hydrogen.' And the queer repeats, 'My friend would like a gin.' And the bartender says, 'We have three kinds: oxygen, nitrogen, and hydrogen.' So the queer finally gets mad and says, 'There's three kinds of turds: mustard, custard, and you, you big pooh-pooh. Run, Freddie, run!'

This is in the style of jokes told by Kenneth Williams. The student collector says she remembered it, not because it was funny, but because she was studying chemistry at school at the time.⁹⁷

Little fairy minces into a pub. 'Large port and lemon, please.' 'Certainly, sir. Here you are.' 'Ooh ta. And would you give all these nice gentlemen along the bar a large Scotch apiece?' 'Well, thanks very much, sir.' 'What about all those nice gentlemen in the public bar? Give them large Scotches too, and while you're at it, have one for yourself?' 'Very kind of you, sir. Cheers! That'll be £27 74p!' Fairy bristles: 'You bold thing! What makes you think I've got that kind of money?' Landlord, without more ado, leaps over the bar, grabs fairy by the scruff of the neck and throws him into the street. A couple of months later, fairy returns to the bar. Landlord says, 'Oh, it's you. I suppose you want a large port and lemon!' 'S'right!' 'And should I give all these blokes along the bar large Scotches?' 'S'right!' 'And the blokes in the public bar, give them one each? And while I'm at it, have one for myself?' 'Oo no, dear, not you. You get nasty when you've a drink inside you!'^{97A}

This second narrative, with an opening similar to the first, weights the listener's sympathy firmly in favour of the barman, no doubt because my informant was hostile to gays.

This homosexual is standing in front of the mirror brushing his teeth and his gums begin to bleed, and he says [with gleeful voice and limp wrists shaking]: 'Oh, goodie, safe for another month.'⁹⁸

This was collected 21 years ago, which no doubt accounts for the tone.

An obviously gay guy swished onto a bus to face a derogatory sneer from the massive bus driver. 'Faggot,' he growled, 'where're your pearls?' 'Pearls with corduroy!' shrieked the gay. 'Are you *mad*?'⁹⁹

Here the supposed dress-consciousness of gay men is burlesqued, as also in the following which was collected recently:

There was a woman who was sick and tired of gay men doing her hair. 'I'm tired of these damn fairies,' she said. She wanted a really macho hairdresser. She hunted everywhere and couldn't find anyone. Finally someone told her, 'I know just the man for you. He won the Golden Glove Contest. [A famous American boxing match]. She was thrilled and booked an appointment. Well, he was really strong and handsome, and macho. And she thought he was wonderful. She said: 'I hear you won the Golden Glove Contest,' and he said, 'Yes, I sure did,' and he pulled his sleeves up, and the golden gloves reached right up to his elbows!¹⁰⁰

Gays are incorrectly supposed to be very house-proud. *Private Eye* has been running a cartoon series entitled *The Gays* for some years. Most of them are not worth quoting, but, in one, the householders return home unexpectedly and gaze in horror at the sitting-room. 'We've been burgled by gays!' exclaims the woman: 'The furniture's been rearranged and there's a quiche in the oven!'¹⁰¹

The final example of this type speaks for itself; mockery of gays' elegant tastes, here symbolized by red roses, is most disagreeably blended with sadistic fantasy:

A gay riding on the Tube saw a good-looking man sitting opposite and followed him out of the station to his office. What luck! The man was a proctologist, and he made an appointment. As the examination progressed the gay's cries of pleasure infuriated the doctor. His job was to cure illness, not titillate, and he threw the man out. But the gay soon phoned again, claiming a genuine medical problem, and the doctor reluctantly agreed. Examining the man, he was amazed to find a long green stem with thorns attached, and

another, and another. 'Good heavens!' cried the doctor, 'You've got a dozen red roses up there!' 'And the card,' gasped the gay, 'read the card!'¹⁰²

A large body of humour focuses on ethnic and rival stereotypes. This Jewish joke was collected from a Catholic:

Two Jewish businessmen were discussing their sons . . . The first said, 'My son is a bum. He just lounges around all day and chases after the models!' The second said, 'You think you've got troubles! My son just hangs around all day and chases after the models!' 'Why are you any worse off than me,' asked the first. 'I'm in men's wear!' he replied.¹⁰³

A Greek, an Italian, and a Jew were walking down the beach and found a lamp. They picked it up and rubbed it, and a genie came out and said, 'I'm going to grant you each a wish, but there's one condition: you can't do anything ethnic for 24 hours. If you do, you'll vanish'. So they were walking down the street and passed a restaurant. They could smell the spaghetti, and the lasagna, and all the pasta, and the Italian said, 'I'm hungry. I'm going to go in and have something to eat.' And the Greek and the Jew said, 'No! You can't do that! That's ethnic!' And he said, 'Oh, that's ridiculous; everybody's got to eat.' So he went in. And just as he stepped through the door—poof!—he vanished. So the Greek and the Jew went on down the street, and they saw a five dollar bill lying on the sidewalk. And the Jew said, 'Look? Somebody dropped some money. I'm going to pick it up!' And the Greek said, 'No, you can't do that! That's ethnic!' And the Jew said, 'Nonsense. Everybody needs money!' And he bent over to pick up the five dollar bill, and—poof!—they *both* vanished.¹⁰⁴

In the American Deep South a gay is a 'Homo Sex You All.'¹⁰⁵ 'Dear Abby,' ran a letter received by an Agony Aunt, 'I have never seen a man go in or out of their apartment. Do you think they could be Lebanese?'¹⁰⁶ 'The safest time to go out in Dallas is 11 a.m. on Sunday morning. The Mexicans haven't got their cars started yet, the Blacks are all in jail, the Baptists are all in church, and the Boys are all at brunch.'¹⁰⁷

The English are sent up through the armed forces and, indirectly, through royalty:

A whole line of guys were getting their physical exams for the army. The first doctor on the line was just checking the heart-beat. As the first guy came in, he put up his stethoscope and said 'Marilyn Monroe.' Thumprhumphumprhumphump. 'Gina LolaBridgida.' Thumprhumphumprhumphump. 'Queen Elizabeth.' Thumprhumphump. 'O.K. You're all right!' The next guy came in. 'Marilyn Monroe.' Thumprhumphumprhumphump. 'Gina LolaBridgida.' Thumprhumphumprhumphump. 'Queen Elizabeth.' Thumprhumphump. 'O.K. You're all right!' Next guy comes in. 'Marilyn Monroe.' Thumprhumphump. 'Gina LolaBridgida?' Thumprhumphump. 'Hmm. Queen Elizabeth?' Thumprhumphump. 'Well—I guess you're O.K. Go into the room with the other guys and get undressed!' Thumprhumphumprhumphump!¹⁰⁸

This one's a story of the R.A.F. It's with two guys. One guy bails out of his plane, and, just as he's been able to get his parachute open, another flyer comes down, but his chute doesn't open. And as he's going by, the other guy catches him. And they're floating down together, and they're going down awhile, and one goes (stage direction: teller assumes heavy British accent): 'Hello.' 'Hello.' 'British?' 'Certainly.' 'Labour Party?' 'Conservative.' 'Oxford?' 'Cambridge.' 'Homosexual?' 'Certainly not!' 'Pity' [drops him]. The American version of this is centred on Yale.¹⁰⁹

The Golden Rivet is a hostile legend invented by sailors of the Royal Navy. All H.M. ships are fitted with a golden rivet down in the hold. Older sailors take young, attractive ones below to see it and, when they bend over to look, hey presto! The young sailor becomes a 'winger' and is rewarded with bars of nutty. This is a fruit-and-nut chocolate that sailors are traditionally fond of. In the U.S. Navy it is known as 'pogey bait.'¹¹⁰

The Poles, according to an American stereotype, are supposed to be very stupid: 'Did you hear about the Polish lesbian? She only liked men.'¹¹¹ The following

narrative was told by an informant of Polish origin—Poles are nearly always Catholic:

An' then there were these two fairies in a gay bar. An' they were fighting. An' the bartender sez, 'Fellows, uh, girls, I mean uh, will you *please* stop fighting, makin' such a noise. It's, it's bad enough running a bar of this type anyway without gettin' raided by the cops!' So they quieted down. A little while later they were fighting again. The bartender says, 'O.K., look, girls, er, guys, excuse me, fellows, ya gotta stop fighting; once more and I'll *have* to ask ya to leave. Now, what's the problem?' 'Aw, he's hawribbul. Fur thuh las' three years I've been livin' wi'm an' he doz'n pick up his cloze, heez a louzy cook, he leaves a mess in d'kitchen all d'time. He's hawribbul.' And the other one says, 'Aw, heez woos. He tawks, tawks, tawks. He goz ou' n' the streets aw d'time; heez na' *loy-el*. He duz dis, he duz dat!' And the bartender says, 'Well, look, if ya hate each other so much, move out!' 'Well, we *can't*. We're Catholic!'¹¹²

The setting here is significant, for bars are important institutions within the gay community: they permit public expression of a minority life-style. Norine Dresser has made a valuable study of this subject.¹¹³ Another bar narrative was collected from an Irish American informant:

A queer goes into a bar and orders a bourbon and water. The bartender says, 'I'm sorry, but we don't serve queers here.' The queer is very upset and says, 'Look, I won't bother anyone, just give me my drink. I can pay for it and you have no right not to serve me.' The bartender again tells him he can't be served and to leave, but the queer says, 'If you won't serve me, I'll call the police and they'll make you serve me.' So the bartender says, 'O.K., here's your bourbon and water. Now just go to the other end of the bar and I don't want to hear a word from you.' So the queer does as he's told. Soon a huge, muscular hairy man walks into the bar, slaps his fist on the bar, and says, 'Gimme a Scotch.' So the bartender does and the man drinks it in one gulp and orders another, which he consumes just as quickly. After a couple more drinks, he pounds his chest and says, 'I feel like a bull.' And from the other end of the bar comes 'Moo . . . moo.'¹¹⁴

This joke dates from the 1960s when the offensive term 'queer' was in common usage.

The Irish are the focal point of several narratives. This one concerns an Irish priest and his penitents:

This guy comes in an' says, 'Father, I've, I've *really* sinned.' An' he sez, 'Well, what's the matter?' 'I've had sex.' 'What's wrong with that?' [long pause] 'With Joe.' 'Sooo, that is a *sin*. Well, you have to say 35 Hail Marys, an' 12 Ave Marias an' whatever else they say. An' ya know, five dollars in the poor plate as you leave, an' ya know, come back an' talk to me agin.' Well, another guy came in and sez, 'Father, I've had sex, I've committed sin!' 'With Joe?' 'Yes, with Joe.' An' this went on with four or five guys . . . 'With Joe.' An' the sixth guy came in, 'Father, I've sinned.' 'Don't tell me, with Joe?' 'No, I *am* Joe.'¹¹⁵

In keeping with another stereotype, the Irish priest here is grossly incompetent. He violates the privacy of the confessional, does not know how to set a penance, and imagines Hail Mary and Ave Maria are two separate prayers. The Irish also feature in a linguistic joke, which consists in a sexual take-off of names: 'Did you hear about the two gay Irishmen? William Fitzpatrick and Patrick fits William.'¹¹⁶ This riddle was told by an Irish informant. Sometimes they occur in a multiple sequence:

- Q: 'What is an Irish queer?'
- A: 'A Gay-lick.'
- Q: 'What is a Spanish queer?'
- A: 'A Senorita.'
- Q: 'What is a Jewish queer?'
- A: 'A He-blew.'

The question and answer format, occasionally telescoped into a single remark ('Did you hear about the two homosexual judges who tried each other?')¹¹⁸ told by a lawyer to another lawyer, and 'Did you hear about the two queer shoe salesmen who fit each other?')¹¹⁹ is very common: 'Did you hear about what happened to the Australian

homosexual and the Italian lesbian who got married? He went back to Sydney and she went back to Florence.¹²⁰ 'What's the difference between a stack of wood and a homosexual? One's a pile with faggots, the other's a faggot with piles.'¹²¹ 'How do you get three gays on a barstool? Turn it upside down.'¹²² 'What do gay termites eat? Woodpeckers.'¹²³ 'What did the elephant say to the naked man? How do you breathe through that thing?'¹²⁴ 'Who was the Roman who drove a pink chariot? Ben Gay.'¹²⁵ 'Have you heard about the queer burglar? He couldn't blow the safe, so he went down on the elevator.'¹²⁶ 'Did you hear about the three gay burglars? One ties up the victim, one does their hair and one redecorates.' 'What's worse than a mugger with a knife? A gay with a chipped tooth.' 'What's green and flies over San Francisco? Peter Pansy.' 'Is it better to be born black or gay? Black, because then you don't have to tell your parents.'¹²⁷ The best four were printed on a greeting card entitled 'Fabulous Gay Jokes,' sent to me by a colleague, who knew I was preparing this paper. It was printed in New York. 'Did you know that queers can't hear so good?' [spoken softly]; 'What?'; [in a normal voice] 'Did you know that queers can't hear so good?' Again the distasteful terminology dates this from the 1960s. The student collector glossed it as follows: 'Jokes involving homosexuals in a derogatory-like light were very common among persons my age—I was 15 at the time. It would seem that this is because awareness of our developing sexuality aroused concomitant fears of possible homosexuality. Deriding homosexuals relieved some of our fears.'¹²⁸ In China, incidentally, at the turn of the century, there was a popular misconception that homosexuality was bad for another faculty, the eyesight.¹²⁹

Light-bulb jokes, also in the question and answer format, were popular in the United States from about 1978 to 1982. Today they are no longer a dominant form. I can't say that I have ever found them funny: 'How many gays does it take to change a light-bulb? Seven. One to change the bulb, and six to shriek Faaaaabulous!'¹³⁰

The word 'fruit' is often used as a derogatory name for a homosexual: 'What do you call a gay bar without any stools? A fruit stand.'¹³¹ 'What do granola and San Francisco have in common? They are both full of fruits and nuts.'¹³² 'Fruitier than a nut cake'¹³³ is a popular simile, and a 'fruit fly' is a woman who enjoys the company of homosexual males 'buzzing' around the fruit. It carries the same significance as the unpleasant term 'fag hag.'¹³⁴ An account describes how:

Two queers who were in love with each other decided one day to make their funeral arrangements. So they went to the funeral director and told him that because they had lived and loved together in life, they wanted to prepare for similar closeness in death. The director nodded his head and said it could be arranged—the flowers, the clothes, the site, the tombstone, etc. 'And I suppose you do want matching coffins,' said the director to the two fairies. 'Oh no, we want to be buried together in the same coffin in eternal embrace,' they protested. Director: 'I'm afraid I can't do that . . . it's against state law. I can have my licence revoked [pause]. 'Oh, but what I can do is cremate you and take all your ashes and mix them together in a . . . in a - a - a [the Director makes gestures with mixing instruments in a circular motion] . . . in a - a . . .' Queers: ' . . . in an urn?' Director: 'No, a fruit jar.'¹³⁵

This unpleasant narrative, which uses two derogatory terms rather unnecessarily, is of interest because it was collected from a Jew, and orthodox Jews do not accept cremation. The scoffing, therefore, operates on two levels.

The derisive term 'fairy,' much in use before the gay liberation movement, is of particular interest to the folklorist, since the relevant material often involved folkloric themes, e.g. 'What do you call a homosexual dentist? A tooth fairy.'¹³⁶ A longer narrative employs the theme of the vengeful fairy:

This was about 1906 and this little fairy walks into, uh, this bar in San Francisco, and he sits way at the end of the bar. And he, the bartender comes up to him and he says, 'I'd like a martini.' And, uh, the bartender comes up to him. He says, 'We don't serve fairies or faggots in this place.' So the little fairy is just infuriated, and he just sits there with his legs crossed an' there at the bar, and glares at the bartender. Just about that time the earthquake hits. My God, chandeliers falling, bottles falling behind the bar. Oh, it's complete chaos, people screaming. Then everything clears out. Everybody's running out an' the bartender's behind the bar all shook up, you know, just shaking, and he looks over across the bar and here the little fairy's still sittin' there glaring at him. The little fairy says, 'Now are you gonna serve me that martini or shall I do it again?'¹³⁷

The story was collected by Norine Dresser, who did her fieldwork in a gay bar in California. No doubt it carried a subconscious significance of the underdog getting his own back. Here is another with a similar theme, also set in a bar:

This big burly truck driver comes walking into this bar. And on a bar stool there is sitting this fairy with a long cigarette holder. Well, this truck driver just hates fairies—they really make him mad. Just then the fairy drops his holder. The truck driver looks at him and says, 'Hey fairy, you dropped your wand.' The fairy just ignores him—doesn't even look at him. So the truck driver really gets mad and says, 'Hey fairy, I said you dropped your wand.' Again the fairy just ignores him and looks straight ahead. Finally the truck driver picks up the holder and says again, 'Hey fairy, you dropped your wand.' The fairy takes the holder from the truck driver and says, 'So, vanish bitch!'¹³⁸

In another American version the holder is dropped on purpose to attract the truck driver's attention. Here the three-fold repetition of 'Hey fairy' adds greatly to the effect of this unpleasant skit on a magic tale. An English variant sets the scene in Piccadilly, where a man walking with his umbrella attracts the attention of a passing lorry driver. It is attributed to the late Ernest Theisiger.¹³⁹ Sometimes the idea is used in fun by members of the gay community. The canteen staff at a famous London insurance firm were all said to be gay. One day there were complaints about the slowness of the service and a member of staff retorted: 'Well, just because we're all fairies doesn't mean we can just wave a magic wand, you know.'¹⁴⁰ The following pun is also good-humoured: 'Two gays were standing on the Golden Gate bridge watching a fairy (ferry) boat go under it, and one turned to the other and said, "I didn't know we had our own navy."'¹⁴¹

The next narrative, a distasteful sick joke, unhappily reflects reality and the physical violence to which gay men are often subjected:

There was a little homosexual lying on the sidewalk with a broken arm and a bloody face, and looking up at the crowd of people staring at him from all sides. He got his breath and said, 'Would somebody please tell that Marine on the fifth floor that us poor fairies can't fly.'¹⁴²

Finally, here are two fairy tales from San Francisco, one told in the form of an extended riddle:

Once upon a time in this kingdom, there was this king who had two daughters. One was the most beautiful girl in the whole kingdom. And the other one was the ugliest girl in the whole kingdom. There was this mean old nasty dragon that roamed around and every year he required a maiden as a sacrifice to keep the kingdom from being destroyed. It so happened that it was the King's turn this year. He loved both of his daughters, and he didn't want to offer one as a sacrifice. So he called for this prince from a far-away land. Said the king to the prince, 'Slay the dragon and I will give to you my most beautiful daughter, or, I will give you the other one, and my throne.' The prince then went searching for the big, bad dragon and, when he found it, he slew it. Now, guess who the prince took? Answer: the King. Remember, this is a fairy tale.¹⁴³

Two knights and their page were riding down the road when they came to a castle. It was getting late so they decided to ask for lodging at the castle. One of the knights shouted 'tally-ho,' in an attempt to get the

attention of the people inside. After a while appeared a swishy silk-robed fellow, who said, 'Hi there, fellows!' One knight looked at the other and said, 'Promise him anything, but give him our page.'¹⁴⁴

This second narrative, with its Walt-Disney-style presentation of life in medieval Europe, is based on an advertisement for perfume, popular in the mid-1960s, when the joke was first collected: 'Promise her anything, but give her Arpège.'

An Irish-American informant provided another narrative with a European setting. In this case the folk hero is gay and a footnote stresses that it is to be read 'with an English accent'; it also employs the stereotype of the lisping gay:

One day Robin Hood and his band of men were preparing to raid the castle of a wealthy baron. You know, in those days the wicked old barons would collect great piles of money and go off, and live in their estates in the country—and they're still living there today. Well, Robin decided his men needed a pep talk, so he got up in front of them and said, 'Come on men, let's rally, rally, rally!' (He waves his right arm around in front of them). 'Rally, rally, rally, men. Now we're going to storm the castle and rape the men and pillage the women!' 'Rape the *men* and pillage the *women*?' 'Yes, we're going to rape the men and pillage the women.' 'Did he say, rape the men and pillage the women?' And then Little John got up—you know, he was about six and a half feet tall—and he said, 'I say, Robin, don't you mean, rape the *women* and pillage the *men*?' And then, from the back of the group, a little voice spoke up: 'Wobin's the boss! Wobin's the boss!'¹⁴⁵

The informant had originally heard this joke from an American who had suggested that he adapt it to an English theme. This he did and used it in his stage act in a San Francisco suburb for many years. A popular American variant centres on the folk hero Jesse James,¹⁴⁶ who traditionally robbed the rich and gave to the poor, according to legend.

Another cycle of narrative takes a good-humoured look at explicitly sexual themes:

Two gay guys were talking when one leaned over and said to the other, 'You know, I just got circumcized two weeks ago.' 'How wonderful,' gasped his friend. 'You must let me see it.' The first man obliged, pulling down his pants (trousers) and proudly displaying himself. 'Ooooh!' shrieked the friend, 'You look ten years younger!'¹⁴⁷

I have heard a female version of this joke: two prostitutes meet after one has been shaved in the usual way for an abdominal operation. The punch-line is the same.¹⁴⁸

From within the gay community comes the account of two homosexual men who: 'were sitting on a park bench when a very beautiful woman walked by. They watched her pass in silence, then one man said to the other, "It's times like these I wish I were a lesbian."'¹⁴⁹ As we have noted in the discussion of cult figures, contrary to the stereotype, many gay men admire beautiful women and try to emulate them. The joke also expresses pride about being homosexual. Collected late in 1980, it is a product of gay liberation thinking. Another short narrative uses derisive terminology, but ends by outwitting the heterosexual:

There was this little coloured faggot that was cruising, uh, Selina Avenue and had been arrested five times for soliciting. So finally the fifth time, why the Judge, uh, says, 'Now look,' he says, 'It's five times you've been arrested for the same thing.' He says, 'Uh, aren't you ashamed or something?' He says, 'Wha, wha, wha, what's going on?' And the kid says, 'Well, Judge, you know how we is.' The Judge says, 'You know how we *are*.' He says, 'You too, Judge?'¹⁵⁰

A longer narrative from Belgium, but set in France, speculates on the sexual effects of drink:

There is a tramp and he's lying asleep on a bench somewhere in Paris, completely sozzled, one evening. And a homosexual comes along and he fancied him. 'Hey, do you want to have a go with me?' He gives him a push, but the man doesn't hear him. So then he takes the guy's trousers off and gives him one. When he has finished he . . . sticks two hundred francs into the tramp's pocket. In the morning the tramp wakes up, feels in all his pockets in search of a franc and finds the 200 francs. He goes straight to the cafe with it: 'Landlord, 200 francs' worth of Stella.' Of course, by evening the guy is well tight again and he goes to sleep on the bench again. The homosexual comes along again, and again the same . . . then he puts 500 francs into his pocket. In the morning the tramp wakes up, feels in all his pockets. Five hundred francs? Back to the cafe: 'Landlord, 500 francs' worth of Stella.' By evening he's again thoroughly tight and he goes off to sleep again. The homosexual comes along, he pulls his trousers off and off he goes. And now he puts 700 francs into his pocket. When the tramp wakes up in the morning, he finds the 700 francs and he's straight off to the cafe with them. 'Landlord! Seven hundred francs' worth of Maes, for that Stella makes your backside sore.'¹⁵¹

Evidently no use was made of vaseline, a lubricant popular with gay men, which provides the humour in the next Chaucerian-type narrative:

There was a guy travelling in the countryside in his car. He has car trouble, and inspects the car. While doing so, he burns the hell out of his arm, and looks for a farmhouse for Vaseline. It is now around dinner time, and meanwhile, back at the farmhouse that the guy is headed for, the wife and daughter are sitting around arguing about who is going to do the dishes. The arguing was driving the farmer crazy, and he said 'We'll settle this once and for all. We'll all lie down in the living room, and lie perfectly still. The first one to move will do the dishes for one month.' So they all agreed, and proceeded to the living room and began their stillness. The guy with car trouble finally got to the house. He knocked, but there was no answer. He saw the lights on in the house and knocked again, but still no answer. 'Gee, this is odd,' he said, and decided to enter the house. He saw the family lying perfectly still on the living room floor, and surveyed the daughter, deciding that he could maybe get some action from her. He decided to get on with her, and, after feeling her pulse and finding it normal, he did. After it was over, he saw the wife, felt her normal pulse, and thought that she was really not bad-looking at all, and decided to get it on with her too. After that, he remembered his burn. 'Gee, I wonder where I could find some Vaseline around here?' At that point, the farmer jumped up and said 'Forget it—I'll do the dishes!'¹⁵²

This prose version of 'Get Up and Bar the Door' (Child No. 275) predates the era of the all-American dish-washing machine. It makes much of the stereotype of the sexually frigid woman, who lies motionless throughout the proceedings. The farmer is also a stereotype, who will go to almost any lengths to avoid doing traditional women's work.¹⁵³

The fantasy world continues in another narration from the gay scene, set in conversational format:

Two gay men are talking, and one says, 'Well, at least you know who the father is, don't you?' And he says, 'What? You think I got eyes in the back of my head?'¹⁵⁴

And here is one more from an American colleague. She arrived in London, saw the G.L.C. building, which was still there, clearly labelled, and thought, 'My, aren't these British *advanced!* Gay Lesbian Centre!'¹⁵⁵

I have found very little relevant graffiti. Joe Goodwin believes that all graffiti arewritten by non-homosexual men in any case. I am not sure that he is right about this, but have no way of checking. He points out, interestingly, that there is little to be found in the male public conveniences of gay establishments.¹⁵⁶ The only examples that I am able to quote are: 'Hello. I am a fairy. My name is Nuff. Fairy Nuff.'¹⁵⁷ 'If God had wanted homosexuality, He would have created Adam and Steve.'¹⁵⁸—this sounds like a feminist slogan. On a contraceptive vending machine 'Go gay—it's cheaper!'¹⁵⁹ 'One thing about masturbation—you don't have to look your best'—this is a quotation from *The Boys in the Band*;¹⁶⁰ and, finally, that old favourite, known

virtually everywhere, 'My mother made me a homosexual!' 'If I give her the wool, will she make me one too?'¹⁶¹ Again there is an echo here of *The Boys in the Band*: 'How sick analysts must get of hearing how mommy and daddy made their darlin' into a fairy.'¹⁶²

There are a few examples of vintage humour. Here are two which, in variant form, were told of Oscar Wilde:

A saucy young dyke [lesbian] of Khartoum
 Took a pansy up to her room.
 As they got into bed
 To him she said
 Who does what, and with which, and to whom?¹⁶³

'Have you heard that Oscar Wilde tried to escape to France, but was found clinging to a boy in the Channel?' Oscar Wilde was tried in 1895. The same joke, part of a large cycle, was told at the time of Lord Montague's trial in 1954, his name being substituted for that of Oscar Wilde.¹⁶⁴

An American colleague, who is an authority on humour, tells me there has been a great increase in anti-gay jokes in the United States since 1980.¹⁶⁵ This coincides with the identification of AIDS, the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, in 1979-80, described in *The Observer* two years ago as 'A U.S. Nightmare.' Most of the victims, as we now know, were gay men in New York City and California, as well as heterosexual Haitians, drug addicts, and blood recipients.¹⁶⁶ Last year the ailing Haitian tourist industry lost 30 million dollars, in part because of AIDS.¹⁶⁷ The moralists have been quick to step in. Press reports refer to the 'Gay Plague'¹⁶⁸ and Peregrine Worsthorne, in a sanctimonious outburst, drew a parallel with medieval accusations that the Jews caused outbreaks of bubonic plague. The Jews, he added ominously, were innocent.¹⁶⁹ At the end of January, an advertisement in the *Church Times* read: 'The Facts (AIDS). Meeting for General Synod Members. Is AIDS God's Wrath?'¹⁷⁰—this although the newspaper's editor had put matters in perspective in a leading article a year earlier.¹⁷¹ 'A Swedish graffito admonishes: "Boys, Boys! God sees you and AIDS takes you."^{171A} Church people who thunder about the wrath of God—a folkloric subject, if there ever was one—would do well to remember that AIDS has reached epidemic proportions in Central and East Africa, where it afflicts missionaries, nuns, and other pious people.¹⁷² This is the background against which AIDS jokes should be viewed, and humourists have been quick to indicate excesses: 'This is an official government pamphlet. There is now a direct link between AIDS and going to see the plays of Oscar Wilde. To act in a play by Oscar Wilde makes you even more likely to contract AIDS than if you just go to see it.'¹⁷³ When another well-known personality, Rock Hudson, died of AIDS on October 2nd 1985, a new cycle of jokes appeared, but they are not funny, and too obscene to quote here.

Many of the AIDS jokes conform to a set pattern:

- 'What do you call a group of gay musicians?
 — Band-aids'¹⁷⁴
- 'What do you call gay guys who run a projector?
 — Visual-aids'
- 'How do gays spell relief?
 — N-O-A-I-D-S'¹⁷⁵
- 'What do faggots drink?
 — Kool-aids'
- 'What do you get if you listen to too many obscene phone calls?
 — Hearing-aids'

- ‘What do you call a couple of gay lawyers?’
- ‘Legal-aids’
- ‘Know what GAY stands for?’
- ‘Got AIDS yet?’¹⁷⁶
- ‘What’s the difference between herpes and AIDS?’
- ‘Herpes is a love story, and AIDS is a fairy tale’
- ‘What’s the great mystery about AIDS?’
- ‘It can turn a fruit into a vegetable’¹⁷⁷
- ‘What’s the most difficult thing an AIDS victim has to do?’
- ‘Convince his parents that he’s a Haitian’¹⁷⁸
- ‘Do you know the latest sweets for homosexuals?’
- ‘After-aids’¹⁷⁹
- ‘Walking within a mile’s radius of Earls Court can give you AIDS’¹⁸⁰

And, finally, a vicious graffito in the Men’s Room at Cincinnati Airport: ‘They’re going to have to change the name of AIDS, because all the black people are applying for it.’¹⁸¹

Heterosexuals expect the homosexual male to be effeminate. In times past the homosexual either disguised his inclinations, or went to the opposite extreme of acting as a token woman, behaving with exaggerated effeminacy. This role was acceptable to society, especially the uneducated. The effeminate male took on the role of court jester or village buffoon. He posed no threat, his interests were clear, but otherwise he was passive and straight men could be safely amused. The gay liberation movement of the early 1970s has attempted to present homosexuals as men, with different sexual interests, but not token women. The result has been a move away from effeminacy and the traditional image of the gay man, towards that of the ‘macho’ male. The gay liberation generation of homosexuals are the first who can be truly open about their identity; they are in the public eye as gay, and have sought a distinct image to define it. This has been expressed in the new ‘clone’ look, a horticultural term signifying a non-sexual method of reproduction. It takes the form of short hair, moustache, plaid shirt, jeans, and tennis shoes, and seems to have originated in the gay residential area of San Francisco. This new masculine image is threatening to straight men and they find it hard to accept; the boundaries are no longer so clearly defined. To some extent clones appear to belong to some sort of club, to be participating in a look-alike contest. Undoubtedly it must help to promote group feeling, and this must be a good and healthy phenomenon. The less this group is accepted by heterosexual society, the greater is the need to create similarity among themselves, and the greater is the need for group folklore. The solidarity of the group image, which is so vital to their culture, enables them to exist among a society which has so strongly rejected their lifestyle in the past.¹⁸²

I began with Alan Dundes, and I will end with Alan Dundes:

To the extent that folklore helps perpetuate racism, prejudice, male chauvinism, stereotypes, etc., we as professional folklorists must point this out at every opportunity. By making the unconscious or unselfconscious conscious, we may raise levels of consciousness. We cannot stop folklore, but we can hold it up to the light of reason, and through the unrivalled picture it provides, we may better see what wrongs need righting.¹⁸³

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117. Terry Pink Alexander, *op. cit.*, July 16 1971.

118. The Folklore Archives, University of California at Berkeley, collected by Jill Hersh, February 20 1974.

119. *Ibid.*; Catherine Read, June 3 1964.

120. *Ibid.*; John Scabill, July 1 1964. See also Reinhold Aman 'Kakologia,' *Maledicta* 7 (1983), p. 302.

121. *Ibid.*; Liza Cohen, January 9 1974.

122. *Ibid.*; Katie Waller, October 27 1979; Jonie Rubin, October 25 1980.

123. Goodwin, p. 60.

124. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
125. *Ibid.* For variants, see The Folklore Archives, University of California at Berkeley. Collected by: Deborah Sharpe, November 28 1974; Karen Kirkpatrick, November 21 1974; Linda McCormick, Autumn 1982.
126. Reinhold Aman, 'Kakologia,' *Maledicta* 6 (1982), p. 297.
127. 'Fabulous Gay Jokes' greeting card (New York, 1985).
128. The Folklore Archives, University of California at Berkeley; collected by Mike Roddy, March 3 1969. This presents an interesting comparison with the European belief that masturbation caused blindness, deafness, acne, and hair to grow on the palms of the hands.
129. J. J. Matignon, 'Deux Mots sur la Pédérastie en Chine,' *Archives d'Anthropologie Criminelle* 14 (Paris, 1899), p. 38.
130. Information kindly provided by Kent Gerard, June 1985.
131. The Folklore Archives, University of California at Berkeley; collected by Kristi Mortimore, November 15 1980.
132. *Ibid.*, Richard Rogers, March 1980.
133. *Ibid.*, Elwood Haynes, October 10 1977.
134. *Ibid.*, Gilbert Haacke, November 29 1974; Dana Treadwell, October 28 1981; Rodgers, p. 87.
135. The Folklore Archives, University of California at Berkeley; collected by Eric Swartz, 1969.
136. *Ibid.*, Sally Hornstein, March 1 1974.
137. Dresser, p. 210.
138. The Folklore Archives, University of California at Berkeley; collected by Thomas Clark, December 29 1965.
139. Information kindly provided by David MacFadyen, May 7 1985.
140. Information kindly provided by Belinda Hunt, from an acquaintance who had worked with the firm, November 1982.
141. Information kindly provided by Dr. Rosan Jordan, October 1985. There are many variants in circulation.
142. The Folklore Archives, University of California at Berkeley; collected by Roger McClanahan, March 1965.
143. *Ibid.*, Jane Lee, September 12 1971. For a variant, see *ibid.*, Bruce Ray, July 1966.
144. *Ibid.*, Salvador Dichiera, March 7 1974. See also *ibid.*, Laurie Haig, January 5 1966.
145. *Ibid.*, Meri Henriques, January 10 1965.
146. Goodwin, p. 152; Dresser, pp. 211-12. She points out that it has been recorded in prison.
147. Information kindly provided by Kent Gerard, January 1985.
148. Information kindly provided by David MacFadyen, March 1985.
149. The Folklore Archives, University of California at Berkeley; collected by Elisa Feingold, November 21 1980.
150. Goodwin, p. 156.
151. Information kindly provided by Dr. Stefaan Top from the University of Leuven Archives.
152. The Folklore Archives, University of California at Berkeley; collected by Andrea Gelfand, February 5 1974. See also Joseph P. Goodwin, 'Humour and Conflict in the Gay World,' *International Folklore Review* 4 (1986), p. 98.
153. Goodwin, *More Man*, p. 160.
154. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
155. Information kindly provided by informant I, September 14 1985.
156. Goodwin, *More Man*, pp. 131-2.
157. Venetia Newall, 'The Moving Spray Can: A Collection of Some Contemporary English Graffiti,' *Maledicta* 9 (1986), p. 7.
158. ed. Reinhold Aman, *Benedicta*. News Organ of the International Maledicta Society (Waukesha; Fall 1982), No. 1, p. 7.
159. Newall, 'The Moving Spray Can,' p. 2.
160. Crowley, pp. 8-9 (copyright © 1968, by Mart Crowley; permission to quote granted by International Creative Management, Inc.). See also Newall, p. 3.
161. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
162. Crowley, p. 10. Copyright © 1968, by Mart Crowley; permission granted by International Creative Management, Inc.
163. Information kindly provided by David MacFadyen, January 1986. See Gershon Legman, *No Laughing Matter* (Bloomington, 1975), Vol. 2, p. 93.
164. Information kindly provided by David MacFadyen, May 16 1985.
165. Information kindly provided by Dr. Pack Carnes, October 1984.

166. *The Observer*, March 18 1984; Kevin Cahill, 'The Evolution of an Epidemic,' *The AIDS Epidemic*, ed. Kevin Cahill (London, 1984), p. 1.
167. Michael S. Serrill and Bernard Diederich, 'Small Stirrings of Change,' *Time* (New York, January 13 1986), p. 11.
168. See *Gay News* (London, March 29 1984), No. 16, p. 10.
169. Peregrine Worsthorne, 'Why AIDS Peril is a Moral Problem,' *Sunday Telegraph*, February 10, 1985.
170. *Church Times*, January 31 1986.
171. *Ibid.*, March 22 1985.
- 171A. Sent to me by Bengt Dagrin, who included it in his book, *Världen är Skiti! Leve Graffiti* (The World is Shitty! Long Live Graffiti), published in Sweden in 1980. Much Swedish graffiti is written in English and originates in the U.K. or U.S.A. I am grateful to Bengt af Klintberg for the introduction to Mr. Dagrin.
172. *Sunday Programme*, BBC Radio 4, January 19 1986.
173. *In One Ear*, BBC Radio 4, April 6 1985.
174. Reinhold Aman, 'Kakologia,' *Maledicta* 7 (1983, p. 291.
175. *Ibid.*
176. Eric Rofes, 'Speaking out on AIDS Jokes and Public Officials,' *Gay Community News* (March 31 1984), p. 4.
177. Aman, 'Kakologia' (1983), p. 291; *The Times*, May 29 1985, in a review of *The Normal Heart*.
178. Aman, 'Kakologia' (1983), p. 290.
179. Information kindly provided by Dr. Stefaan Top from the University of Leuven Archives.
180. *In One Ear*, *op. cit.*
181. Information kindly provided by Dr. Francis de Caro, October 1985.
182. Information kindly provided by Belinda Hunt, November 1982; The Folklore Archives, University of California at Berkeley, collected by Sandra Brandedberry, November 28 1978.
183. Dundes, p. 135.